

Lean in and Listen. Jesus has a Message for You.
Week Three Notes
Message of Joy
John 15:1-11

Chapter 14 concludes with Jesus and the disciples leaving the Upper Room. It is night. The streets of Jerusalem are dark as the disciples, in dumbstruck confusion, follow Jesus out of the city and into the hills surrounding Jerusalem. Jesus is heading for the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives.

The disciples know their dreams of ruling with Jesus are nothing but pipedreams and misunderstanding. They know He is the Messiah. They are confused about how that plays out. Jesus is leaving. They are still trying to take it in.

As Jesus and the disciples silently walk, they probably pass through an ancient vineyard. Jesus stops. The disciples lean in. He has another message for them in the dark confusing moments of the night. Jesus says, it is a message of joy(John 15:11). How could it be? They lean in to listen.

I. The Beauty of Fruit

Two themes emerge in John 15. **Fruit and Abiding**. Jesus uses an extended metaphor to teach the disciples the meaning of these words. He uses three people or characters in the metaphor.

The Vine (vs 1)

The Vinedresser (vs 1)

The Branches (vs 5)

In the vineyard, the vine is the trunk of the plant. It can be huge and the ancient vineyards like those in Jesus' day (and still in Israel) could be hundreds of years old. The vine is the large part of the plant that connects to the soil. It has the root system. It carries the nourishment for the plant. The vine is the imperative to any crop of grapes.

Jesus said, "I am the true vine." *True* means *real*. Jesus is the life giver, the source of nourishment, the vital part of the plant.

The vinedresser owns the vineyard. His only purpose is to get the best and the most luscious crop of grapes possible. He will do whatever it takes to get grapes—and a lot of them.

God is the vinedresser. He wants fruit—a lot of it

We—believers in Christ—are the branches. The branches are the long, running, spindly growth that produces buds, which turn into grapes. Fruit (grapes) appears on the branches in the right season. The branch of a grapevine is good for nothing except producing fruit.

So what is fruit?

The word fruit is used throughout Scripture. When used metaphorically, *fruit* can mean a variety of things.

Galatians 5:22 Fruit of the Spirit. The qualities of Jesus expressed through our unique personalities.

Romans 1:13. Ministry, converts

Philippians 1:22 ministry, good work, converts

Hebrews 13:15 The fruit of our lips, our praise to God, Thankfulness. Our spoken words

Colossians 1:10 good work

James 3:17-18 The fruit of righteousness. Being right with God and the good works that are a result.

Ephesians 5:8-9 Fruit of light. Good works, ministry, work that has Jesus as the source.

Fruit, in the life of a believer, is anything that glorifies God. If it glorifies God, the source of it is Jesus.

Our purpose is to bear fruit. It is the only purpose of the believer. God's purpose is make sure we do.

So how much fruit does God want?

These 11 verses speak about levels of fruit in the life of a believer.

No fruit (vs 2)

Fruit (vs 2)

More fruit (vs2)

Much fruit (vs 5-6)

How does God move us from no fruit to much fruit?

We must read these verses in John 15 very carefully and keep them in context of the passage as well as the context of Scripture as a whole. If you isolate any verse in this passage, you are in danger of misunderstanding the truth and believing a lie.

Verse 2 has two parts. Look carefully at them in the context of a vineyard.

“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away.” As first sight, it seems Jesus is saying we can somehow loose our salvation. But that is FAR from the truth.

Jesus uses the phrase “in Me”. That is *in Christ*. We are secure in Christ. We cannot be snatched out of the Father's hand if we are genuinely believers. We cannot loose our salvation.

Jesus uses the word translated in Greek *ario*. It means *to take away, to take up, to lift up*” It is uses many times in the New Testament. Matthew 14 20 uses the word *ario* when the disciples picked up and took away 12 baskets of leftovers after the Lord fed the 5000.

In John 15:2 the phrase “take away” does mean throw away. It means to lift up and carry.

New branches on a vine have a natural tendency to trail downward. If that new branch touches the ground, it gets dusty, then wet from rain, and then muddy. The new buds that form are infected with Black Rot causing the new grapes to rot on the vine. No fruit.

The vinedresser lifts up the stray branch and cleans it. Then he ties it to the trellis, changing the direction, the natural bent, of the branch. For the branch, the tying and retraining is uncomfortable but necessary for producing fruit. The vinedresser does not cut off. He lifts up.

As believers, especially new believers, our natural tendency is to gravitate toward sin. That downward trailing that inhibits fruit. God lovingly picks us up out of the dust of sin. He forgives (cleans us) and then TIES us to the trellis. He disciplines us. Discipline does not mean punishment (although it can) It's greater meaning is training. The training and correcting can be uncomfortable for us. Hebrew 12:11 says discipline is unpleasant at the time, but yields good results.

God's discipline is never out of control. Never administered in rage or anger. Never without purpose and direction. God's discipline is always out of a heart of love. He wants us to fulfill our purpose as believers—and that purpose is to bear fruit. He will use whatever means necessary to get fruit—even discipline. The discipline will continue in the life of a believer as long as we hold on to sin.

The second part of Verse 2 says, "...and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit."

Pruning may seem as unpleasant as discipline, but the tools are different and the purpose is different. Like God's discipline, pruning is never random. Pruning means to reduce, to thin, to cut back.

Pruning is ALWAYS necessary. Branches can grow up to 20 feet in one year. As they grow they produce incredible, and even beautiful, green leaves. They look great. They are very busy branches. But branches have two goals—self-preservation and self-glorification. They want to grow longer and longer-so there is more branch. And they want to look good—lots of leaves.

The problem is when there is much branch growth and lots of leaves, there is very little fruit, because the leaves steal all the nourishment and they block out the sun. The vinedresser wants fruit. So, he prunes back the busy growth and beautiful foliage of the branch. And so does God.

Like the branch, we can become very busy Christians. We have lots of growth, lot of ministry. We have beautiful leaves-, ministry that looks good to the eye but at

the end of the day, there is very little eternal, lasting fruit. So, God prunes. He thins and He cuts away the useless growth and self-glorifying leaves. He halts the busyness so more fruit can grow.

We are like those busy branches. We like to look good. We like self-preservation (more of *us*) and we like to look good doing it. It gives the appearance of productivity. But since God wants fruit, He prunes. He cuts away the external things that steal the nourishment. He takes away the very things that we think are good, and encourages fruit that glorifies Him. God wants us to surrender the things that sometimes give us our self-worth, and our identity. The things we would rather hold on to.

“God is even willing to risk you and I misunderstanding His heart and His methods in order to get the fruit He desires” (Secrets of the Vine, Bruce Wilkerson, p.58).

Pruning is described in other ways in Scripture. Psalm 66 uses the term “refining” as refining silver to get the dross out, increasing the value and purity of the silver. God refines us. He prunes.

Interestingly. The older and more mature the vine, the more intense the pruning. Older vines have the ability to produce prolific growth—increasing every year. The vinedresser must prune them hard in order to get even more fruit.

For more mature believers, this is really good news. We never outgrow our usefulness. God always sees the potential for more fruit and He will do anything to get it. Remember, pruning is not simply taking away. It is making room for more. He cuts away the lesser to make room for the greater.

Pruning is never random. The vinedresser prunes every branch differently. He never whacks away hoping for good results. He examines each branch. He considers the possibility for fruit. He cuts away only what is necessary to free the branch from its self-seeking, self-glorifying bent.

For us, the Lord will use different means and different tools to prune. He may severely cut away or He may use the natural consequences of an exhausting self-glorifying life. He may allow exhaustion, sickness, or the emptiness of a busy life to take hold of us. Like discipline, pruning is always out of a heart of love for us.

Pruning is rarely pleasant. Pruning from the branches perspective is rarely pleasant. But from the vinedresser's perspective, it is necessary.

Be careful with these verses. Read them in the context of all Scripture. Jesus is not saying every bad or uncomfortable circumstance is God's pruning. We live in a fallen world. Bad things happen. *Difficult circumstances however, are always an opportunity for fresh surrender to God, allowing Him to use the difficulties to do a work of maturing in our lives. James 1:2-4.*

When God is pruning, the safest place to be is in His arms. We have a tendency to run for the shears. But in the times of thinning out the over growth of busyness and cutting away the lesser, we need to cling to Him, seek Him, lean into Him, trusting His heart of love for us and His purpose in our lives of bearing more fruit that glorifies God.

II. The Blessing of Abiding

*"Lord, let me make a difference that is utterly disproportionate to who I am."
(John Piper)*

God wants MUCH fruit. The key to fruitfulness in the life of a believer is *abiding*. Jesus uses the word abiding 10 times in just 6 verses. When a word is repeated in a passage of Scripture, we should sit up and take notice. The word *Abiding* is not just repeated once or twice—it is drilled, over and over. **Abiding is vital to the Christian life.**

To abide means to dwell permanently; to make a home; to remain united in heart, mind, and will; to persevere and remain steadfast.

Jesus introduced the concept of abiding in chapter 14. He spoke of His abiding in the Father and the Father abiding in Him. Abiding is relational. For us, it is the key to much fruit.

In our western culture, we like results. We work harder and faster to produce more results. God is not interested in results. He wants fruit. **Results are counterfeit fruit.** Results look good but usually they are self-preserving and self-glorifying. Results have no seeds—they cannot multiply themselves. Genuine fruit has seeds.

Abiding, not working harder and faster, is the secret of fruit bearing. Read John 15:5-6 carefully. The branch must stay attached to the vine otherwise **NO fruit** is possible. We must abide, dwell, be of one heart mind and will with Christ in order to bear fruit. We can do *nothing* that glorifies God, apart from Him. Why?

Jesus is the life source. He is the energy. He is the Life-giver. Like the branch, when it is attached to the vine, the life-giving sap flows through the vine and into the branches enabling the branch to produce fruit. The sap for us is the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Christ living in us. No one can see the Spirit, but everyone can see the results---fruit! Ephesians 3:16-20.

In a vineyard, the amount of sap that flows to the branches is directly related to the width of the branch at the point where it attaches to the vine. The thicker the branch, the more room for sap to flow.

As we abide, our capacity to overflow with Christ increases. **We do not get MORE of the Holy Spirit. We just expand in our ability to let Him work through us.**

Verse 7 is the about prayer in the context of bearing fruit. As we abide, we can ask for any fruit that glorifies God because we understand the heart of God and ask accordingly.

Verse 8 is the purpose of abiding—to glorify God

Verse 9 is the motivation for abiding—love

Verse 10 is the responsibility of abiding—obedience. There are no rogue branches. We are responsible for responding to God in obedience.

So what does abiding look like in our daily lives? Is it just punching a 15-minute time-clock, a quiet time, so we can say we did it for the day? Is it all about feelings and emotions?

Abiding is relational. It is very similar to falling in love—you cannot teach someone how to fall in love. There are certainly principles and guidelines but love is relational, it is cultivated. It deepens over time. It may be filled with emotion at times, but as it matures, abiding love moves beyond simple emotions and become deep communion.

Abiding is hallmarked by *listening*. When Jesus moves into us through the means of the Holy Spirit, He is not a silent resident. He speaks! He uses the Word of God to speak to us. He will never say anything to us contrary to God's Word. And when He speaks **we listen and obey**.

Abiding is also marked with *talking*. Prayer. Prayer is not a mysterious encounter. It is the verbalization of a surrendered life. We pour our hearts out to God, we thank Him for answers before they ever arrive, we frame our requests in the Word and the desires of Jesus (in His Name). Praying is relational not duty.

Does abiding require *time*? Yes it does. As any relationship does. It requires alone time, intimate time, face to face time—not just big crowds and groups—not just Sunday morning church attendance—it requires devoted, personal time

Will there be *feelings*? Sometimes. But a deep relationship is not dependent on feelings. They are nice every once in a while, but emotions can be fickle, selfish, and fleeting. *Communion trumps feelings every time*.

So is Jesus telling us that abiding is sitting around, doing nothing, waiting for fruit to grow? NO! Abiding is not inactivity. It is allowing the Lord to direct our efforts with discernment and wisdom. It is also allowing the Lord to infuse our efforts with His power and His ability. Our work and our ministry can accomplish more by abiding in Christ, yielding greater fruit, than we can ever accomplish with our own effort and works. Again, a spiritual paradox. Less is more.

Look back at John 15:6. It is a warning. But again, be careful with the context of the passage and Scripture as a whole. We cannot lose our salvation. So, what does Jesus mean by throwing away and burning?

Remember, a grape branch is useless for anything except bearing fruit. The wood cannot be used to build anything. Jesus is saying if the branch refuses to produce fruit it is useless. It will be pushed aside. The lack of fruitfulness is not the fault of the vinedresser, it is the choice of the branch. This is not a verse about losing salvation. It is about the loss of usefulness.

The pronoun changes in the middle of the verse from singular to plural. The results are burned away. By choice the branch/ we have refused the joy of fruit

bearing. We have forfeited the eternal reward of fruit bearing as well. Our reward has been burned up. It is a somber warning to the branches. Stay connected. A fruitless branch cannot bring Glory to God and thus a fruitless branch is useless in the kingdom of God.

John 15:11, Jesus reminds the disciples, this message is not meant to bring fear or confusion. *It is meant to bring great joy.* While the disciples cannot fully understand what is unfolding on this dark night in Jerusalem, Jesus is encouraging them. He is encouraging us as well with a message of great joy. *God is at work in you. He has a plan and a purpose for you. He wants the most fruit out of you that He can possibly get and He will be lovingly relentless in getting it. He knows the Christ in you, and because of Christ, He knows you have great potential to glorify God.*